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## Patent Claims

5 1. An apparatus for determination of the spatial  
alignment of a semitrailer (6) or trailer which is  
connected to a prime mover (5), having sensor means (7,  
8) which are arranged on the prime mover (5) in order  
to produce sensor signals which describe the spatial  
10 alignment of the semitrailer (6) or trailer relative to  
the prime mover (5), with the sensor means (7, 8)  
detecting contours of the semitrailer (6) or trailer,  
and having an evaluation unit (15) which uses the  
sensor signals produced by the sensor means (7, 8) to  
15 determine at least one angle variable which describes  
an angle between the prime mover (5) and the  
semitrailer (6) or trailer,  
characterized  
in that the sensor signals which are produced by the  
20 sensor means (7, 8) include image information from a  
two-dimensional representation (16) and/or an image  
(16') of a linear subarea of the detected contours of  
the semitrailer (6) or trailer, and with the evaluation  
unit (15) determining the at least one angle variable  
25 on the basis of the image information by evaluation of  
the rate of change of geometric characteristics of the  
two-dimensional representation (16) and/or of the image  
(16') of the linear subarea of the detected contours of  
the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

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2. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a first  
angle variable, which describes an angle ( $\alpha$ ) between an

AMENDED SHEET

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 2

axis which is oriented in the longitudinal direction of the prime mover (5) and an axis which is oriented in the longitudinal direction of the semitrailer (6) or trailer, and/or determines a second angle variable, which describes an angle ( $\beta$ ) between an axis which is oriented in the vertical direction of the prime mover (5) and an axis which is oriented in the vertical direction of the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

3. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a first angle rate variable and/or a second angle rate variable, with the first angle rate variable representing the rate of change or derivative of the first angle variable, and the second angle rate variable representing the rate of change or derivative of the second angle variable.

4. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or 3, characterized in that the evaluation unit (15) uses the first angle variable and/or the second angle variable, and/or the first angle rate variable and/or the second angle rate variable, to determine a mass variable which describes the current mass of the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

5. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or 3, characterized in that the evaluation unit (15) uses the first angle variable and/or the second angle variable, and/or the first angle rate variable and/or the second angle rate variable, to determine a mass distribution variable, which describes the distribution of the mass along an axis which is oriented in the longitudinal direction of the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

AMENDED SHEET

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 3

6. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or 3,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) uses the first angle  
variable and/or the second angle variable, and/or the  
5 first angle rate variable and/or the second angle rate  
variable, to determine a center of gravity height  
variable, which describes the height of the center of  
gravity of the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

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7. The apparatus as claimed in claims 4 and 5,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a threshold  
value for the first angle variable and/or for the first  
15 angle rate variable as a function of the mass variable  
and of the mass distribution variable, with the  
evaluation unit (15) appropriately influencing drive  
means (26) and/or braking means (28) and/or steering  
means (30) for the prime mover (5) and/or braking means  
20 (36) in the semitrailer (6) or trailer in order to  
prevent the magnitude of the first angle variable  
and/or of the first angle rate variable exceeding the  
respectively determined threshold value.

25 8. The apparatus as claimed in claim 7,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) produces a driver  
warning if the difference between the magnitude of the  
first angle variable and/or between the magnitude of  
30 the first angle rate variable and the respectively  
determined threshold value is less than a respectively  
predetermined limit value.

9. The apparatus as claimed in claim 7 or 8,  
35 characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) determines the

**AMENDED SHEET**

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 4

threshold value for the first angle variable and/or for the first angle rate variable taking into account the instantaneous driving state of the prime mover (5).

5 10. The apparatus as claimed in claims 4 and 6,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a threshold  
value for the second angle variable and/or for the  
second angle rate variable as a function of the mass  
10 variable and of the center of gravity height variable,  
with the evaluation unit (15) appropriately influencing  
drive means (26) and/or braking means (28) and/or  
steering means (30) for the prime mover (5), and/or  
braking means (36) in the semitrailer (6) or trailer,  
15 in order to prevent the magnitude of the second angle  
variable and/or the magnitude of the second angle rate  
variable exceeding the respectively determined  
threshold value.

20 11. The apparatus as claimed in claim 10,  
characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) produces a driver  
warning if the difference between the magnitude of the  
second angle variable and/or between the magnitude of  
25 the second angle rate variable and the respectively  
determined threshold value is less than a respectively  
predetermined limit value.

12. The apparatus as claimed in claim 10 or 11,  
30 characterized  
in that the evaluation unit (15) determines the  
threshold value for the second angle variable and/or  
for the second angle rate variable taking into account  
the instantaneous driving state of the prime mover (5).

35 13. The apparatus as claimed in claims 4 and 5,

**AMENDED SHEET**

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 5

characterized

in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a nominal value for the first angle variable and/or for the first angle rate variable as a function of the mass variable and of the mass distribution variable, with the evaluation unit (15) appropriately influencing drive means (26) and/or braking means (28) and/or steering means (30) for the prime mover (5) and/or braking means (36) in the semitrailer (6) or trailer in order to allow the first angle variable and/or the first angle rate variable to assume the respectively determined nominal value.

14. The apparatus as claimed in claim 13, characterized in that the evaluation unit (15) determines the nominal value for the first angle variable and/or for the first angle rate variable taking into account the instantaneous driving state of the prime mover (5).

15. The apparatus as claimed in claim 13 or 14, characterized in that means (55, 56) are provided for detection of the roadway profile, with the evaluation unit (15) taking into account the detected roadway profile in the determination of the nominal value of the first angle value and/or of the nominal value of the first angle rate variable.

16. The apparatus as claimed in claims 4 and 6, characterized in that the evaluation unit (15) determines a nominal value for the second angle variable and/or for the second angle rate variable as a function of the mass variable and of the center of gravity height variable, with the evaluation unit (15) appropriately influencing

**AMENDED SHEET**

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 6

drive means (26) and/or braking means (28) and/or steering means (30) for the prime mover (5), and/or braking means (36) in the semitrailer (6) or trailer, in order to ensure that the second angle variable  
5 and/or the second angle rate variable assumes the respectively determined nominal value.

17. The apparatus as claimed in claim 16,  
characterized  
10 in that the evaluation unit (15) determines the nominal value for the second angle variable and/or for the second angle rate variable taking into account the instantaneous driving state of the prime mover (5).

15 18. The apparatus as claimed in claims 16 or 17,  
characterized  
in that means (55, 56) are provided for detection of the roadway profile, with the evaluation unit (15) taking into account the detected roadway profile in the  
20 determination of the nominal value of the second angle variable and/or of the nominal value of the second angle rate variable.

19. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or 3,  
25 characterized  
in that means (55, 56) are provided for detection of the spatial alignment and/or of the dynamic response of the prime mover (5) relative to the contours of the roadway, with the evaluation unit (15) using the  
30 detected spatial alignment and/or the detected dynamic response of the prime mover (5) relative to the contours of the roadway to determine the spatial alignment and/or the dynamic response of the vehicle combination and/or of the semitrailer (6) or trailer  
35 relative to the contours of the roadway by taking into account the first angle variable and/or the second

**AMENDED SHEET**

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 7

angle variable, and/or the first angle rate variable and/or the second angle rate variable.

20. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1,  
5 characterized  
in that the sensor means (7, 8) comprise an arrangement of imaging sensors, which are designed to detect electromagnetic waves in the visible or invisible optical wavelength range or in the radar wavelength  
10 range.

21. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1,  
characterized  
in that the sensor means (7, 8) are part of a blind-  
15 angle monitoring device or of a rear-area monitoring device.

22. The apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or 3,  
characterized  
20 in that the first angle variable and/or the first angle rate variable, and/or the first angle rate variable and/or the second angle rate variable are used to provide a parking aid and/or a reversing aid.

23. A method for determination of the spatial alignment of a semitrailer (6) or trailer which is connected to a prime mover (5), in which sensor signals are produced which describe the spatial alignment of the semitrailer (6) or trailer relative to the prime  
25 mover (5) with contours of the semitrailer (6) or trailer being detected in order to produce sensor signals, and in which the sensor signals which are produced are used to determine at least one angle variable which describes an angle between the prime  
30 mover (5) and the semitrailer (6) or trailer,  
35 characterized

AMENDED SHEET

June 11, 2005

## Replacement page 8

in that the sensor signals which are produced include image information from a two-dimensional representation (16) and/or an image (16') of a linear subarea of the detected contours of the semitrailer (6) or trailer, 5 with the at least one angle variable being determined on the basis of the image information by evaluation of the rate of change of geometric characteristics of the two-dimensional representation (16) and/or of the image (16') of the linear subarea of the detected contours of 10 the semitrailer (6) or trailer.

**AMENDED SHEET**

June 11, 2005